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Anti-racist Education Assessment in Hartford schools

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Abstract

Anti-racist content has been lacking in the education system in the past. When it comes to addressing issues of race and racism candidly in schools and classrooms, most teachers and administrators tend to ignore race and racism questions. Based on a survey that evaluated anti-racist education and training at their school, the questionnaire measured participants' perceptions of anti-racist education and their satisfaction with the training. 44 participants completed the survey. This study analyzed the effectiveness of the anti-racism training and the challenges faced by the participants in the teaching. The results of the survey showed that participants were very satisfied with the anti-racism training and the teaching environment they found themselves in, but participants still faced teaching difficulties and support from the school. Still, participants faced challenges in teaching, and their reports of racial incidents varied from school to school.

Keywords: anti-racist, anti-racism training, anti-racism education, teaching

Introduction

During the 2019-2020 school year, several members of the Hartford Federation of Teachers participated in anti-racist training developed by the school administration. The training required educators to read the book "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo. A copy was provided to educators. There will be other content about anti-racist training provided in the future, but when this research was conducted the sole focus of the training was on the use of this book as an important part of anti-racist training.

Working with teachers at the Hartford Federation of Teachers, a survey was designed to measure educators' perceptions of anti-racist training. The aim is to understand the anti-racism training provided by the school in the past, to assess their usefulness and effectiveness, and to gather views on what will be useful in the future. The survey designed to answer two research questions: 1. What is the usefulness and effectiveness of the anti-racist training content in Hartford middle schools? 2. What challenges do the diversity training, anti-racist curriculum, and anti-racist materials present for Hartford teachers to teach anti-racism in the classroom?

Literature Review

The anti-racist education discussed in this study can be understood as a set of education that promotes racial equality and affirms and eliminates white privilege. （Niemonen, 2007）Students learn about anti-racist content and theories by studying anti-racist education in school, through seminars and reading books. The research uses a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative research, to focuses on anti-racist and diversity training, anti-racist curriculum, and anti-racist materials as the main themes of the investigation. (Fossey, 2002)

Some argue that racism is a Eurocentric value, a normative framework that defines whiteness as a standard by which to judge others. Racism is a deeply rooted system of unequal practices that exclude, create and reproduce socioeconomic status. Racism today is subtle and invisible. （Niemonen, 2007）Race is rooted in an autonomous culture whose logic is largely unconstrained by material factors.

Racism and Education

Students connect history and the present as they consider race and racism. (Neville, 2020) They also implicated social institutions before placing themselves in the continuing legacy of race and racism.

Anti-Racist Training

The purpose of the training is to eliminate prejudice against race. As mentioned above, this article refers to the training provided in one of the books the participants received.

Research of Anti-Racism Professional Development

Past studies have shown that anti-blackness is an important part of racial slavery and its afterlife, that the anti-black framework emphasizes black uniqueness and experience, and that the defining opposition of modernity is black and non-black relative to non-black social groups. (Prime, 2019) African Americans face racism in K-12 school education and STEM teacher education programs. Some teaching methods such as "race Visible" are mentioned (Prime, 2019), meaning teaching methods that explicitly or implicitly address race and racism in curriculum content and all curricula to address racial discrimination encountered by African Americans in STEM or other fields. (Nxumalo, F., & Gitari, W, 2021)

Some past studies have recognized the lack of a comprehensive review of research on racial literacy in education. (Johnson, Lisa & Antle, Becky & Barbee, Anita. 2009)A number of similar studies reflect the same problem in the education system, where there has been concern about the diversity of people of color in textbooks. Also, when it comes to addressing issues of race and racism candidly in schools and classrooms, most teachers and administrators prefer to ignore the problem of race and racism or to teach using what is

often called a color-blind approach. (King, 2016) The basic idea behind the colorblind

approach is that ignoring racial differences in schools and classrooms will lead to more

equity, rather than explicitly focusing on racial differences in schools and classrooms. This

kind of color-blind education will bring many unfavorable results to students.

Compared to past evaluations of anti-racism training, Between June 2007 and June 2008

(Johnson, Lisa & Antle, Becky & Barbee, Anita. 2009), 462 training participants completed

pre and post-training assessment questionnaires. Questionnaires measured changes in

participants' attitudes toward race and knowledge of key concepts related to race and

racism, as well as their satisfaction with training and expected changes in practice.

Preliminary findings indicated that participants were very satisfied with the training,

increased their knowledge of race and racism issues, and became more aware of racial

dynamics. However, much of the shortfall came from feedback from participants that there

was still much more that could be done with anti-racism training.

Methods

Participants and Data Collection

Demographics also included in the survey, for instance, the cities, schools, grades, and

subjects they teach, their ethnic identity, gender, and years of teaching experience. This

provides a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the diversity of experiences

and differences in anti-racism and diversity training of schools and teachers in different

regions.

This study inherits the Anti-racist Project of Trinty College's Liberal Arts Action Lab in Spring 2022. In the Action Lab, a team of 6 people worked together to design the questionnaire, so it's worth mentioning that the questionnaire is a team effort. The questionnaire was designed to ask questions primarily from the teachers' perspective to understand the progress of anti-racism education in Hartford schools through their training experiences, classroom content and the current status of school-related policies, as well as their personal feelings and related experiences therein. For example, have they received anti-racism training; is their classroom and school diverse; how do they, as teachers, practice and teach anti-racism-related content in their school? Do they have a satisfactory environment for discussing race issues; what discrimination have they observed as a teacher and what do they think they could improve?

My main data collection tool was a 25 questions anonymous survey. These questions include multiple-choice questions. For example, "I feel that my lesson plans reflect the cultural identities of the students in my classroom." The options are from strongly agree to strongly disagree.   Open-ended questions are used as an extension of the multiple-choice question, "Since you do not agree you feel comfortable talking about racism in your classroom, please explain what would make you feel more comfortable." In this way, further understanding and research into the deeper and more detailed aspects of some of the issues, breaking through the limitations of the issues themselves. It also shows more possibilities and relevant attitudes and contents.

Data Analysis

123 responses were received between April and May 2022. The participants were all teachers in grades 6-12 in Hartford, Connecticut. 44 out of 123 of the participants completed all the questions.

Table 1. Characteristics of Teacher Survey Respondents (N=44)

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	34	79.1%
Male	6	14.0%
Prefer not to say	3	7.0%
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-white	3	7.0%
White	36	83.7%
Prefer not to say	4	9.3%
Age		
20-29	9	22.0%
30-39	14	34.2%
40-49	9	22.0%
50-59	5	12.2%
60 and above	4	9.8%
Lives in Hartford		
No	35	79.6%

Yes	9	20.5%
Years of Experiences		
Less than 10 years	13	30.2%
10-15 years	15	34.9%
More than 15 years	15	34.9%
Grade Level(s) Taught		
Middle school	24	54.6%
High school	16	36.4%
Both	1	2.3%
Elementary School	3	6.8%
Subject(s) Taught		
Math	13	27.1%
ELA	19	39.6%
Science	5	10.4%
Social Studies or History	5	10.4%
Art	1	2.1%
Foreign Language	3	6.3%
Other	15	31.3%
School Offered PD in anti-racist education	32	72.7%

79.1% of the participants were female and 14.0% were male. 7% of the participants

prefer not to say. 36% of participants identified as white. 22.0% were 20 to 29 years old,

34.2% of the participants were 30 to 39 years old, 22.0% were 40 to 49 years old, 12.2%

were 50 to 59 years old, and 9.8% were over 60 years old.

As mentioned above, the test consists of 25 questions. 17 of the questions were

multiple choice and 8 were open-ended. The survey collected information about the

participants' background, grade they taught, subject, gender, age, how many years they

taught, and what school they went to.

Centering on these four aspects, these questions were designed to assess the current

situation of anti-racist Education in the Hartford area. Eight open-ended questions provided

a sample for the study. Participants provided a variety of content based on the content of

the question, which included participants' personal experiences in the past and feedback

based on anti-racist education.

Results

The majority (72.7%) of schools or districts offer professional development on anti-

racism. Teachers provide anti-racism content through assigned readings and group

discussions, often including a book on racism in the curriculum. For the remaining schools

that did not provide anti-racism training, teachers responded with the following feedback:

(1) Schools should provide curriculum training relevant to Latino /POC students, explaining

in detail the use of critical race theory and curriculum appropriate for middle schools. (2)

Cultural background, anti-racist religious identity, racial identity, and gender identity. (3)

Book clubs and curriculum revision meetings (4) how to use racist language in the classroom

and how to teach tolerance and acceptance when they are inundated with racial topics (5)

Critical race theory and human rights.

Table 2. Teachers Perceptions

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
I feel comfortable talking about racism in my classroom.	0.0%	11.6%	44.2%	44.2%	43
I feel comfortable talking about White privilege in my classroom.	2.3%	13.6%	40.9%	43.2%	44
My lesson plans reflect diverse viewpoints.	2.3%	9.3%	76.7%	11.63%	43
I have the flexibility to incorporate diverse curriculum and materials into my lesson plans	9.3%	32.6%	42.9%	16.3%	43
I feel supported and/or encouraged by administrators at my school to include anti-racist materials in my lesson plan.	4.7%	16.3%	65.1%	14%	43

I feel that my lesson plans reflect the cultural identities of the students in my classroom.	7%	14.0%	67.4%	11.6%	43
I feel confident in my ability to teach my students about racism in the U.S.	4.7%	27.9%	53.5%	14.0%	43
I feel that it is my responsibility to teach my students about race and racial inequality	2.3%	11.6%	53.5%	32.6%	43

88.4% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were comfortable talking about racism in class. Some of the remaining participants reported that they didn't want to say the wrong thing in class. 84.1% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable talking about white privilege in class. In contrast, participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed reported 3 main points, (1) when a white teacher works with predominantly black/Hispanic students. The teacher did not want his words to come from or be interpreted as coming from a place of privilege. (2) Not all white people are privileged. (3) The social issues discussed in engineering classes are always embarrassing.

Most of the participants agreed that (1) their lesson plans reflected different perspectives. (2) They have the flexibility to incorporate different lessons and materials (e.g. texts, assignments, films) into their lesson plans. Participants reported difficulties in designing lesson plans, including that (1) there was no room to build lessons, and that

Hartford provided texts and lessons for teachers, who could make suggestions but were generally strongly encouraged to follow district materials. (2) It's very difficult for white people to be supportive/non-racist toward other characters in fiction or nonfiction. (3) Math classes don't necessarily allow for the merging of these things the way ELA/ social studies do.

79.1% of participants had received support and/or encouragement from school administrators when anti-racist material was included in their lesson plans. 74% of participants felt that their lesson plans reflected the cultural identities of the students in the classroom.

Table 3. Teacher Observations About School Racial Climate

	Frequency	Percent
Frequency of racial discrimination in the last 3 months		
Never	10	23.3%
Only a few times	9	20.1%
A few times a month	7	16.3%
At least once a week	17	39.5%
Change in school racial climate in the last 6-12 months		
Changed for the worse	5	11.6%
No change at all	35	81.4%
Changed for the better	3	7.0%

23.3% of participants had never observed a racially motivated incident in the past 3

months (February, March, April). 20.1% of participants observed a few times. 16.3% of

participants were observed a few times a month. 39.5% of participants observed once a

week but not every day. None of the participants observed such events daily. Using a time

frame of the past 6-12 months, 11.6% of participants said the school racial climate had

gotten better, 81.4% said it had not gotten any better, and 7.0% said it had gotten worse.

Table 4

	Did not Receive Anti-racist PD	Received Anti-racist PD	Total
Comfort Talking About Racism			
Strong Disagree	0	0	0
Disagree	0	16.1%	11.6%
Agree	58.3%	38.7%	44.2%
Strongly Agree	41.7%	45.2%	44.2%
N	12	31	43
Comfortable Talking About White Privilege			
Strong Disagree	0	3.1%	2.3%
Disagree	8.3%	15.6%	13.6%
Agree	50%	37.5%	40.9%
Strongly Agree	41.7%	43.8%	43.2%

N	12	32	44

Comfortable Teaching About Racism

Strong Disagree	8.3%	3.2%	4.7%
Disagree	33.3%	25.8%	27.9%
Agree	58.3%	51.6%	53.5%
Strongly Agree	0	19.4%	14.0%
N	12	31	43

Responsible for Teaching About Race/Racial Inequality

Strong Disagree	8.3%	0	2.3%
Disagree	8.3%	12.9%	11.6%
Agree	58.3%	51.6%	53.5%
Strongly Agree	25%	35.5%	32.6%
N	12	31	43

Teacher feels supported by administration to teach

about antiracism

Strong Disagree	8.3%	3.2%	4.7%
Disagree	16.7%	16.1%	16.3%
Agree	75%	61.3%	65.1%
Strongly Agree	0	19.4%	14.0%
N	12	31	43

Table 4 compared the participants who received Anti-racist PD and did not receive Anti-racist PD. The table shows that participants are generally satisfied whether they accept Anti-racist PD or not. However, participants who do not accept Anti-racist PD show more satisfaction on some questions than participants who accept Anti-racist PD. For example, participants who did not accept Anti-racist PD fully (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to Comfort Talking About Racism. While 16.1% of participants who accept Anti-racist PD still disagree with this view. This shows that the influence of Anti-racist PD is not absolute, there are still other factors contributing to participants' choice.

Findings

First, most participants agreed that Hartford schools and districts provided effective anti-racism training. The anti-racism text and Curriculum, Diversity Training had a positive impact on the participants. Most participants were able to talk about racism in class and reflect different points of view through lesson plans. Although a significant number of participants reported difficulties from various aspects, including how to discuss racism with students in an appropriate way, how to integrate anti-racist content into lesson plans, and the diverse teaching methods that need to be explored.

Second, some of the similar responses suggest that there is still a lack of diversity in teaching materials, such as the white predominance of past literature. This makes it difficult for teachers to choose the right materials for their students because they are scarce. On the other hand, some participants reflected that it is difficult for science and math teachers to integrate anti-racism content into their curriculum. Evidence suggests that material for anti-

racist education needs to be further developed. There is still a lack of diversity in teaching

materials.

Third, although most of the answers reflect the positive and effective aspects of anti-

racism teaching, it is worth noting that racial discrimination still exists, and the incidents

caused by racial discrimination in schools still occurs. Most participants reflect that the

racial climate in schools will not get better (81.4%). The data suggest that the situation does

not improve significantly. Therefore, anti-racism and diversity training in school settings is

still necessary.

Conclusion

Anti-racism training offered by schools in the Hartford area is a good point to start and

is expected to positively assist participants in the teaching process. In this nascent process,

teachers provided feedback that was critical to Hartford's anti-racism training.

The limitation of this study is that there are not enough quantitative research samples,

only 44 participants have fully answered 25 questions. If more participants are included in

the survey, the study will yield a more comprehensive and objective answer. On the other

hand, with the continuous development of anti-racism training, more and more training

methods will be developed and encouraged, which will provide a better sample for the

evaluation of training.

For educators, diverse teams with anti-racism themes, innovative teaching methods,

and extracurricular practices or team activities should be encouraged to better explore and

improve the current situation in schools.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. Please select the grade(s) you teach

2. Did you live in the city where your school is located?

3. Please list the school where you teach.

4. Has your school or district offered professional development seminars focused on anti-

racism?

5. Since you answered YES to the last question, please explain the content of these

trainings (for example, guest speakers, topic areas covered, readings assigned,

discussion prompts)

6. Since you answered NO to the last question, please explain the types of trainings you

would like to see offered at your school

7. Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. I feel comfortable talking about racism in my classroom.

8. Since you do not agree you feel comfortable talking about racism in your classroom, please explain what would make you feel more comfortable.

9. I feel comfortable talking about White privilege in my classroom.

10. Since you do not agree you feel comfortable talking about White privilege in your classroom, please explain what would make you feel more comfortable.

11. My lesson plans reflect diverse viewpoints.

12. I have the flexibility to incorporate diverse curriculum and materials (such as texts, assignments, films) into my lesson plans

13. If you do not agree you have flexibility to incorporate diverse curriculum and materials, please explain.

14. I feel supported and/or encouraged by administrators at my school to include anti-racist materials in my lesson plan.

15. I feel that my lesson plans reflect the cultural identities of the students in my classroom.

16. I feel confident in my ability to teach my students about racism in the U.S.

17. I feel that it is my responsibility to teach my students about topics related to race and racial inequality in the subject area(s) I teach.

18. In the following questions, please select that answer that best reflects your opinion/experience(s). In the last 3 months, how many times have you observed an incident you would describe as the result of racial discrimination?

19. Using the past 6-12 months as your timeframe, which of the following best describes

changes in the racial climate in your school?

20. Age

21. Please indicate how long you have been teaching in the box below

22. Gender

23. Racial identify (select all that apply)

24. Racial identify (select all that apply): Other

25. Subjects you teach (select all that apply)

26. Subjects you teach (select all that apply): Other

27. Would you be willing to be contacted for a follow up interview about your experience

as a teacher, either in person, on the phone, or via Zoom?

28. Would you be willing to be contacted for a follow up interview about your experience

as a teacher, either in person, on the phone, or via Zoom? Yes (please provide contact

information in the box below)